

Wizard of Oz

By John Knollin Haws Jr.

Staged in a blue-gingham dress and pig-tails, Judy Garland belted out, “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” in the 1939 MGM movie musical, “The Wizard of Oz.”. Dorothy, hand-in-hand with a cowardly lion, a scarecrow that needed a brain, and a heartless tin man, try to heed instructions by “following the yellow brick road”. Their journey takes them from munchkin land to the Emerald City to meet with the Wizard of Oz (Baum). Each year at Christmas time, the Wizard of Oz movie has been shown on national television for children of all ages to share.

This movie was based on L. Frank Baum’s book “The Wizard of Oz”. Baum had never published a children’s book before. The book became an immediate hit and was the number one storybook sold in the 1900 Christmas season. Baum had never succeeded financially until this publication allowed him to take care of his family. (Ritter 171) In 1904, Baum published the “ The Marvelous Land of Oz”. Baum said he never had any intention of publishing a sequel. He received over 1000 letters requesting a new book. He reluctantly wrote this and other works of literature. (Littlefield 2) The book spawned 13 other Baum Wizard sequels. Several movies and children cartoon versions have been created based on the book. Currently, Broadway has the successful musical, “Wicked” based on the Wizard of Oz. This production has been setting new attendance records. Musical composer and director, Andrew Lloyd Webber, is working on a new musical version of the Wizard of Oz for Broadway. Any reader can go to any book store and find copies of all the Wizard of Oz books for another generation to read and enjoy. While the “Wizard of Oz” continues to be a successful children’s book, it seems that this is not the reason Baum wrote the book. The Wizard of Oz

was not written as merely a children's book, but as a satire on the political environment, his views on the economy, and the gold standard.

Lyman Frank Baum was born on May 15, 1856 and died in 1919, just 19 years after publishing the Wizard of Oz. He grew up in a wealthy family. In his early 20's he wrote a play that made it to Broadway. He married Maud Gage, in 1882. She was the daughter of Matilda Roslyn Gage. Matilda was one of the leading suffragettes in America (Ruckoff 740). She helped draft the Women's Bill of Rights. She co-authored "The History of Women's Suffrage 1881-1886" with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She also wrote other feminist books. (Barrera 2). Baum supported suffrage and women's rights. His mother-in-law was a regular in the Baum home. He actively campaigned for suffrage while he was in South Dakota. (Hansen 257-258) Baum's great-granddaughter told audiences in 2003 that Gage's beliefs in politics and freedom for women led to the development of the central character. "Dorothy" was the heroine of the book. These political themes influenced Baum's using a girl as an American hero instead of another boy as within the works of Mark Twain (Tom Sawyer or Huckleberry Finn). Baum and his mother-in-law were very close and believed in similar liberal issues. (Barrera 1). Baum's "The Marvelous Land of Oz" blatantly takes on the issues of feminism and the suffragette movement. Dorothy was a strong female and her leadership was followed by the men around her. Dorothy makes the decisions and stands up for her male companions. (Littlefield 2).

Baum was associated with the Agriculture Movements. Early in his life he had been a poultry breeder. He founded the Empire State Poultry Association. He was the founding editor of the Poultry Record (Barlow 477). Baum was not a successful poultry farmer. Most of his farming and poultry endeavors failed miserably. His years in South Dakota added to his political view on the plight of the farmer. Western farmers were starting to unite and use politics and elections to fight for farming issues

and rights in America. Baum joined this fight while in South Dakota. (Littlefield 2). Farmers throughout the west were drawn to Populism by bad crops and farm foreclosures. He addressed the farmers as his “friends and brothers, honorable and good men” in the Wizard of Oz. He portrayed Kansas as dull and gray. He described Uncle Henry as working from morning until night and did not know what joy was. The most famous farmer in America at the time was Henry Wallace. Everyone called him Uncle Henry. This made it clear why Dorothy’s uncle is called Henry. Dorothy tells the Good Witch of the South at the end why she must return to Kansas. “My greatest wish now,” she added, “is to get back to Kansas, for Aunt Em will surely think something dreadful has happened, and that will make her put on her mourning; and unless the crops are better this year than they were last I am sure Uncle Henry cannot afford it.” (Ritter 177). The farm played a central theme in the Wizard of Oz. Dorothy wanted to see other places but once there Dorothy soon found there was no place like home.

The major issue of the political scene at the time was American currency and the standard for the dollar.. Under President Benjamin Harrison, the Sherman Silver Purchase Act was enacted. This law required the Department of the Treasury to purchase 4.5 million ounces of silver each month. The passage of this act saw many people fear that the United States would abandon the gold standard. There was a massive run to trade their “green back” dollars for gold. President Cleveland fought to repeal the Silver Purchase act. Although he was eventually successful, the country went into a financial depression. Cleveland and the Democrats were tainted with this failure. (Beito and Beito 2). “Greenbacks” or paper money were only a symbol of money. It was backed up by gold and unless you had the gold you really had nothing. Only gold and silver were valuable. Most people believed that the gold standard was a symbol of a nation’s moral qualities and national honesty. Grover Cleveland saw his popularity totally destroyed by this issue. (Caruthers and Babb 1570).

In the 1896 election, the Republicans supported the gold standard and nominated William McKinley. The silver issue became the cry of the Democrats. The Democratic convention in Chicago saw the party turn down the gold standard in favor of the sixteen-to-one plan. The sixteen-to-one plan sought to raise commodity prices for hard-pressed farmers. The silverites wanted the Federal Government to implement an inflationary monetary policy of free silver. Under that policy the dollar value of sixteen ounces of silver would be equivalent to the dollar value of one ounce of gold. They speculated that the result would have been a rush to trade silver for dollars. This would cause rapid dollar inflation and a depreciation of the currency. The Democrats nominated William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska. This issue split the Democrats and put William McKinley and the Republicans into office (Beito and Beito 2-3).

While in Chicago, Baum saw the devastating depression caused by the financial policies of Grover Cleveland. Baum took part in the pivotal election of 1896 marching in “torch-light” parades for William Jennings Bryan. Baum seemed to be in his support of labor and while in Chicago he voted consistently as a Democrat. Baum was an ardent supporter of the Bi-metallic standard and support for the farmers of America. (Littlefield 3) While in Chicago, he frequented the Chicago Press Club and met some of the city’s leading writers. It was in Chicago that Bryan gave his most famous “Cross of Gold” speech. This speech clearly defined Bryan as the silver candidate. Bryan didn’t support greenback nor greenbacks being backed by gold. (Ruckoff 740-741).

. The pages of the Wizard of Oz are filled with images and lessons associated with the political and economic scene at the turn of the century. Review of the characters and places of Oz can give vision to the heart and soul of the message. After a review of these images, there seems to be no question as the intent of Baum’s work.

Kansas

Dorothy begins her story in Kansas. Kansas is the state that always has represented the independent farmers. Kansas City was to be the scene of the Democratic National Convention in 1900 where William Henry Bryan would be nominated again (Ruchoff 745). Kansas is depicted as dull, drab, and lifeless gray. You read about the “sun-beaten grass and the paint-stripped house” (Taylor 418).

Dorothy

Dorothy represents the average good American. She is the girl next door. (Taylor 417-418). Dorothy represents America. Her syllable Dor-o-thy are the reverse of the syllables The-o-dore. This could have represented Theodore Roosevelt who was a popular republican that supported the working man and farmer.

Twister

Twisters and cyclones were used in the 1890's as a symbol for political revolution that would transform the political scene. The free-silver movement was often likened to a whirlwind that had taken the nation by storm. (Taylor 418). Ranjit Dighe also believed that the cyclone could represent the Populist silver movement. (476). The Cyclone threw Dorothy's house down on the Wicked Witch of the East. This saved the silver slippers.

Silver Slippers

Dorothy's silver slippers represented his support of the Populists' views on solving the economy by the free and unlimited coinage of silver. (Parker 49). Dorothy acquired the Witch of the East's silver slippers. The wicked witch knew the power of the silver slippers and wanted to take them from Dorothy. (Taylor 419). Ruchoff believes that these silver shoes are the silver component of the

bi-metallic standard. Glinda the Good Witch explained that the silver shoes would carry her over the land to Kansas. “If you had known their power you could have gone back to your Aunt Em the very first day you came to this country. All you have to do is knock the heels together three times and command the shoes to carry you wherever you wish to go.” (Littlefield 5) .

Yellow Brick Road

The Yellow Brick Road was pictured as mundane and dangerous. (Littlefield 5). The yellow brick road represented the Gold Standard. This contrasts with the silver slippers which walk and skip along the road. (Dighe 185). The characters must follow the yellow brick road to get to the Emerald City and visit the wizard.

Scarecrow

The Scarecrow represents farmers who need to get a brain. The Scarecrow-Woodsman combination represents the formation of the Farmer-Labor Party which eventually merged with the Democratic Party. The Scarecrow was wise, led by common sense and resilience. He was not as stupid as the Republicans thought the Democrats were. At the end of the story we learn that the Scarecrow-farmer had sense all along. He knew that the real problems of the farm came from the United State’s money policies (Taylor 420). The farmer didn’t need a brain. They understood the real monetary issues better than the politicians of the day. (Ruchoff 746-747). The scarecrow was chosen to replace the wizard when he departed in the air balloon. (Ritter 180).

Tin Woodsman

The Tin Woodsman is the symbol used by Baum to portray the working man. The witch transformed the Tin Woodsman into a heartless machine and took away his true love. His joints had become rusted, so he has become a part of the unemployed worker in the economy of the 1900’s. He too will find that

his heart is not at the end of the yellow brick road (Ruchoff 747-748). Baum was skeptical of the machine age and new technology. (Ritter 181). In the 1902 stage adaptation of the play written by Baum, the oil needed by the Tin Woodsman was likened to the oil of the monopoly Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company. In the play, the Tin Woodsman wonders what he would do if he ran out of oil. The scarecrow quipped that he would be as bad off as John D. Rockefeller. He would lose \$6,000 a minute if that happened. (Littlefield 6).

Cowardly Lion

The Cowardly Lion could represent numerous individuals. Many editorials of the day, pictured Grover Cleveland as the lion. The Cowardly Lion could have represented Cleveland because of his support of the Bi-metallic specie standard had changed and he was scared to work to make it succeed. He yielded to his fears and worked to overturn the Sherman Silver Act. Most people believe that the lion was William Bryan himself. Lion rhymes with Bryan. He had courage even though he thought he was scared. He finally showed great leadership with the bi-metallic issue. (Taylor 421) (Ritter 181).

Emerald City in the Land of Oz.

The Guardian at the Gate of the Emerald City told Dorothy and her three friends that they must put on the spectacles before entering the Emerald City. They asked why and were told if they did not wear spectacles the brightness and glory of the Emerald City would blind them. (Carruthers and Babb 1556). The Emerald City represents "greenbacks" and the "dollar" that are backed up by Gold. The Emerald City is the center of Oz. Oz is the abbreviation of one ounce of gold. The Emerald City is a city of illusions and deception. The green glasses can help you see a different side of the Emerald city than is real. (Ritter 182) The green glasses are held with a band of gold. Most of the Emerald City is

green in general with very little details. The greenbacks were in the center of the plan to help take care of the farmers by the Republicans and the Goldbugs. (Taylor 425)

Wizard of Oz

The Wizard of Oz seems to represent President William McKinley. The “Great and Terrible” Wizard turns out to be a hoax. The wizard can appear as anything he wishes or chooses.. He is seen sometimes as an enormous head and other times as a terrible beast. He promises to give Dorothy and her friends their desires if they kill the Wicked Witch. Although they kill the witch and come back, he doesn’t keep his promises. (Ritter 182). President McKinley was often characterized as a “wizard” for his political skills and dealings while in office.

Yes, the political and economical images of the “Wizard of Oz” transcended the mere children’s story along to political satire and imagery. Bradley Hansen believes that Baum did not write this book as an economic allegory. There is no evidence where Baum admitted that this was the purpose of his book. He believes that it is a good book to teach students about these economic lessons, but we shouldn’t teach the students that this was the reason he wrote the book (Hansen 261-263). Baum was a political animal that believed in political ideas more than political parties. His ideas follow the principles found in the book. Hansen made the statement that “It is as difficult to prove that the Wonderful Wizard of Oz was not a monetary allegory as it is to prove that it was”. Taylor uses the point that Baum supported Republican ideas as he editorialized in the South Dakota paper (Taylor 425). The South Dakota paper was Republican. Baum was hired by a Republican newspaper and Baum was expected to editorialize Republican views. This was the job he was hired to do. He wrote on issues he believed in. He also wrote some poetry for a newspaper in support of President McKinley.

All of these political issues did not relate to the bi-metallic beliefs that he espoused in the Wizard of Oz. The plight of the Native Americans was illustrated. The flying monkeys were used to represent the Native Americans. The Leader of the monkey says,” Once we were a free people, living happily in the great forest, ...doing just as we pleased without calling anybody master. Like the Indian nations, the flying monkeys were not bad. Under a good leader, they are good. When under an evil leaders, they do evil. As the Monkey King said, “ We belong to this country alone and cannot leave it” The same could be said of the Native Americans (Littlefield 6).

Most of those who do not believe that the Wizard of Oz was a political satire believe that it was just a good children’s book. The 1939 MGM musical did more to make it into a children’s book than the book does. The movie made all of the characters more loveable than they are in the book. Most Americans recognize and can sing the songs from “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” to “We’re Off to See the Wizard, the Wonderful Wizard of Oz.” Americans want to belong to the Lollypop Club and help save the scarecrow from the fire of the Witch. Hearts flutter in anticipation of the pail of water melting the Wicked Witch. Yes, these images are definitely viewed as a magical tale for children. The movie changed the slippers from silver to ruby. The movie changed the tin woodsman’s axe from gold and silver to basic brown and gray. The movie made no connection of the Emerald City to greenbacks and money. The green of the Emerald City was not trimmed with gold. The movie enforced and guaranteed that this tale would be loved by all.

The real story from the book will be used in history and economic courses to teach lessons of history in the 1896 and 1900 elections and the monetary policies of Grover Cleveland through President Theodore Roosevelt. Baum said a person should read the book for fun. Everyone should read the book to experience the real political allegory found in its pages. Dorothy thought that getting away from the

farm and going to far-away places, would bring happiness. Once away from the farm, she found that gold, and the yellow brick road did nothing to get her safely home. It was the silver slippers that could lead her back home and provide safety to the farms of America.

Yes, the Wizard of Oz was not written as merely a children's book but as a political satire on both the economy and the gold standard.